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NORWID'S DIALOGUES OF THINGS

Without the risk of committing a more serious error, it can be said that the world of things is not a poetic dominant in Cyprian Norwid's works. Neither in the sphere of his poetic imagination nor in the sphere of his intellectual reflection does it play a primary role, and though, it is so despite the fact that the historical moment seems to be absolutely conducive to this problem. The postromantic "turn towards things", towards objects that took place particularly in the second half of the 19th century can be observed in various areas of human activity. We know well that the intense civilizational changes at that time reflect, *inter alia*, the changes and the increased importance of human material surroundings, that the art of that time was interested in the material side of the reality, setting its course for realism, whereas philosophy, starting with Hegel and his students through Marx and the representatives of positivism, was thoroughly analysing and simultaneously transforming the very notion of a thing¹. Hegel still considers the thing a classic motif of speculative and idealistic metaphysics and combines it with the concept of objectification (thingification). By contrast, Marx introduces to the speculative reflection on things a new sociological and economic perspective, recognizing the phenomenon of parallel autonomisation of things and human alienation². In turn, epistemological positivism in its various varieties (empiriocriticism, "immanent" philosophy, realism) emphasises the inseparable connection between the consciousness and the object, the self and the outside world. At the same time, it addresses the salient issues such as the nature of the mutual relations of the subject and the object, the possibilities of the objective existence of things, the conditions of knowing the extra-phenomenal reality etc. In the representative view of Hipolit Taine, these dilemmas are captured in a series of questions:

¹ See, for instance, M. KWIETNIEWSKA, *Res. Studium transformacji pojęcia rzeczy od Hegla do dekonstrukcji filozoficznej*, Łódź 2009.

² See J. BARAŃSKI, *Świat rzeczy. Zarys antropologiczny*, Kraków 2007, p. 245.

Is there among the properties of these impressions through which, in the end, we always understand and define all bodies, at least one that we could legitimately assign to the bodies themselves? Or are the bodies, in fact, just ordinary complexes of lasting authorities or possibilities about which we cannot say more than that or for us they result in some consequences? And further, are these bodies only, as Bain and Stuart Mill believe, following Berkeley, a pure non-being, which the human mind, as a result of illusion, transforms into substances, creating from them external objects? Is there nothing in nature beyond the series of fleeting impressions that constitute the self of sentient beings, and beyond the permanent possibilities of those impressions? For example, is there nothing inherent in this stone here? [...] Does there exist a series of internal phenomena that we could transpose from ourselves and by way of induction or analogy bestow them on a stone in order to thus grant it that kind of independent and autonomous existence that we have granted to beings like us and animals? – Yes, I think it exists³

– replies Taine and subsequently submits to a psychological analysis impressions, whose sources – facts and phenomena – exist objectively.

Without putting things at the centre of his imagination and thoughts, Norwid did not avoid this problem. It seems that he could not disregard it – as an insightful observer and critic of his increasingly “objectified” modernity, but also as a poet of culture, recognising the value of material culture, and finally as a Christian, convinced of the importance of the Incarnation. In his *Notatki etno-filologiczne*, apparently in a polemical style, he wrote:

M a t e r i a (?).

Kwestia realności.

– – Wrażenia zewnętrzne przez nerwy mózgowi i szpikowi podawane telegramami.

Do-tnięcie wszechzmysłowe.

(Atoli całość takowego wrażenia jest natury d u c h o w e j).

Atomu nikt nie widział – jest koncepcją, jak prostopadła.

(Ale to, że istnieje prostopadła i atom, mamy ze świata s p i r y t u a l n e g o).

(PWsz VII, 416)]

[M a t t e r (?).

The question of reality.

– – External sensations served to the brain and bone marrow by telegrams through the nerves.

Omnisensory touch.

(After all, such an entire impression is of a s p i r i t u a l nature).

No one has seen an atom – it is a concept just like a p e r p e n d i c u l a r.

(But that there exists a perpendicular and an atom, we know from the s p i r i t u a l world).]

³ H. TAINE, *De l'intelligence*, vol. II, Paris 1870, pp. 57-58 – cit. after S. KRZEMIEN-OJAK, *Taine*, Warszawa 1966, pp. 144-145.

The quoted fragment shows how much Norwid was concerned with the issues relating to the ontological duality of spirit and matter, and in particular, seen from this perspective, the issue of the coexistence of both principles in constituting reality and in the process of its cognising. As we know (much has been written about it), it was typical of Norwid to attempt to overcome the antinomy between the material world and the spiritual world⁴, which is closely related to the poet's belief in the insufficiency of empirical, sensory cognition of reality, and in the need to complement it through the act of inner experience that intuitively illuminates the dark thing, which is life itself. I do not have to add that this way of reasoning leads to the concept of cognition by approximation, thinking by analogy and poetics of parable.

Contemporary humanities in various fields – philosophy, sociology, cultural anthropology – declare the need to intensify research on the world of things. There are voices coming from all sides emphasising the need to return to things, to materiality, to everyday life, to the non-human. These slogans are accompanied by hopes of crossing the ontological border dividing people and things, going beyond the dispute of realism and philosophical idealism, finding a balance between *logos* and *res*, and sometimes even talking about overcoming an anthropocentric position, one of the undesirable consequences of which is held to be deontologisation, dematerialisation of things⁵. Two main positions are discernible in this reflection. The concept of the semiotic thing participating in the creation of human semiotic universes is now being developed (although some believe, as a counterpoint) in the sense of things as intermediaries in the system of social activities. Things are no longer merely symbols of the idea of the human mind, i.e. vehicles of meanings, beliefs and values, but essential factors of the social existence of the man, they actively participate in establishing individual and collective identities, in the dynamics of social processes of continuation and change. Therefore, the object of reflection is *res agens* and, by extension, interactions between the thing and the human being, since although the man shapes the thing and equips it with meanings, the thing itself also has the power of performative impact on the man.

⁴ See, for instance, E. FELIKSIĄK, *Poezja i myśl. Studia o Norwidzie*, Lublin 2001. In this sphere of views, Norwid goes against the mainstream of the philosophical tendencies of his times, characterised by a multiplicity of extreme positions (e.g. materialists, subjective idealists, realist-agnostics) which are simultaneously hostile to dualism.

⁵ See, for instance, J. BARAŃSKI, *Świat rzeczy...; Rzeczy i ludzie. Humanistyka wobec materialności*, eds. J. Kowalewski, W. Piasek, M. Śliwa, Olsztyn 2008; „Kultura Współczesna” 2008, vol. 3 (monographic volume devoted to anthropology of things); M. KRAJEWSKI, *Są w życiu rzeczy... Szkice z socjologii przedmiotów*, Warszawa 2013; B. OLSEN, *W obronie rzeczy. Archeologia i ontologia przedmiotów*, transl. by B. Shallcross, Warszawa 2013.

It is not without reason that I recall here the tendencies present in the contemporary reflection of the world of things. I think that a certain group of Norwid's works can obtain a fuller interpretation in this context. To this group I have included works that are diverse in terms of form, these encompass: *Wieczór w pustkach (fantazja)*, *Toast. Fantazja, Bajka*, [Na „Kazanie Skargi” Jana Matejki], [O, jakże drogim jest klejnotem], [Miło być od swojego czasu zrozumianym], as well as the legend *Garstka piasku* and dramas: *Krakus* and *Za kulisami*. These works come from different stages of the poet's artistic life – starting with *Wieczór w pustkach* from 1840, and ending with works from 1877-1880, known in their draft versions. In spite of all the differences between the texts mentioned, there is something that connects them and seems to indicate a permanent creative predilection of Norwid. In all these works, things are given the status of a literary character endowed with the ability of speech, conversation (dialogue or *quasi*-dialogue) and action. Thus, Norwid grants them the status of ontic autonomy, a peculiar “subjectivity” and agency. Of course, this artistic operation of reviving things might be explained by literary conventions, to which the writer evidently refers. Therefore, in the works listed above we can easily recognize the poetics of fable, magical fairy tale, literary tale, legend or fantasy (this term is used particularly often by the author in this context, also used in reference to *Za kulisami*), but Norwid always treats the cognitive horizon set by the genre as an incentive to cross various borders, as a starting point for his own artistic creation⁶.

It is significant that the protagonists of the above-mentioned works by Norwid are, above all, things belonging to the sphere of everyday life, which through their everyday use seem almost semantically transparent, almost absent, because due to our knowledge about them – usually pre-reflective and habitual – their existence is reduced to the functional dimension. Hence different objects are given voice, for example, “household appliances” (a clock, a window frame, a picture), things from the antiquarian store (a table leg, a broom, a stick, a disturbed daguerreotype, an old candlestick without a candle, a pot, a scorched cauldron, chemical matches, a bucket of clean water), but also a threshold, a hat-case, an umbrella-case, a straw mattress with holes, a bag of chaff, an old harp, a fan, a bat. These objects, often banal in their everyday character, poor, and sometimes even degraded by the fact of going out of use and losing their uselessness, through speech gain ontic

⁶ Both Norwid's fable and fantasy have been the subject of research which confirmed that in his poetic work both terms have not only a genological sense. This is particularly evident in the case of fable, which has been previously conventionalised to a great extent. See G. HALKIEWICZ-SOJAK, *Młodzieńcze „fantazje” Cypriana Norwida*, [in:] EADEM, *Nawiązane ogniwo. Studia o poezji Cypriana Norwida i jej kontekstach*, Toruń 2010, pp. 35-46; D. KALINOWSKI, *Bajki Norwida?*, [in:] *Genologia Cypriana Norwida*, ed. A. Kuik-Kalinowska, Słupsk 2005.

autonomy, vitality and spirituality. Of course, by their mere presence, they testify to the existence of the material world, but under special circumstances (“– I było cicho... szara upiórów godzina, / Czas, w którym nieme rzeczy zamieniają słowa” [– And it was quiet ... a grey ghost hour, / Time in which silent things exchange words] (*Toast*, PWSz I, 275) they also expose its obviousness and one-dimensionality. For instance, in *Wieczór w pustkach*, the dialog of household appliances reveals the strangeness inherent in the immediate environment of the man. In his absence, in silence and darkness, the objects in the flat almost “surrealistically” change their shapes and functions:

[...] Stół wielki, niby słoń wędrowny
W głębokim unuczeniu, oparł się o ścianę
I wyprężył grzbiet twardy, księgami ładowny.
Nad stołem wisi obraz, ale jakiś taki
Dziwny, niby szerniałą opowiada twarzą,
Że czuje, jak się w ramach zaległy robaki,
Że czuje, jak pająki po licach mu łązą,
I myśli Bóg wie o czym. [...]

(PWSz I, 30)

[...] A huge table, like a wandering elephant
In deep fatigue, leaned against the wall
And flexed the hard back, loaded with books.
Over the table there hangs a picture, but somehow
Strange, with an apparently blackened face it tells
That it feels worms creeping in its frames,
That it feels spiders striding on its face,
And it thinks of God knows what. [...]]

The conversation led by home appliances and the bindweed focuses on the inevitability of passing away and death, on the futility of dreams and deeds. However, this image of reality filled with futility (*vanitas*) ultimately finds a counterbalance – the poem ends with the triumph of the light, which is also God’s voice. The ending “visualises the elemental metamorphosis that people experience every day – the alternation of darkness and light. This both repetitive and ordinary experience simultaneously turns out to be a metaphor of the act of creation, the gesture of God pulling the world out of non-existence in the act of Genesis”⁷. It can be said that the “chorus of appliances” through which the silence speaks in the poem, is an integral part of the bipolar whole (darkness – light, silence – voice). But it

⁷ G. HALKIEWICZ-SOJAK, *Wobec tajemnicy i prawdy. O Norwidowskich obrazach „całości”*, Toruń 1998, p. 121.

also participates, as an inalienable link, in revealing the fundamental truth about the nature of the reality. The symbolism of futility and the sacred is used here in both ontological and cognitive sense.

Thus, it turns out that Norwid's things live their own, hidden life, and – as might be thought – this is happening in line with the vision of the world synthetically presented in a poem that is part of a letter to Maria Trębicka (30 May 1856):

W tej powszedniości, o! jakże tu wiele
Mistycznych rzeczy i nieodgadnionych,
Małych, jako światełka w kościele
Na dzień za dusze święcon pogrzebionych –
Czerwoną iskrą drżących chwilę jedną,
Przez to, że za dnia świeci, nad-powszednią!...
(PWSz I, 255)

[In this ordinariness, oh! How many here
Mystical and unfathomable things,
Tiny as lights in the church
On the day consecrated to the souls of the buried saints –
With a red spark flickering for a moment,
Because it shines during the day, an extra-ordinary spark! ...]

Conversations between naturally mute objects epiphanically lead deep into the reality, reveal the spiritual “lining” of the material world, and sometimes, as in *Wieczór w pustkach*, they lead to theophany. It is in this “extra-ordinary” sphere of existence that the voice of things is heard, dialogues are established between them, small and great dramas with their participation take place. Such a presentation of the speaking things is certainly related to Norwid's spiritual-material conception of the word, treated as a “sign of the existence of the spirit in the matter”⁸, from which it follows that the speech of things is also potentially a manifestation of what is spiritual, primal, original, it can be a sort of its “delivery”. Moreover, the image of speech-endowed things capable of having conversations is congruous with the poet's conviction of the dialogical, dramatic essence of not only language (speech “dla tego, że jest mową, musi być nieodzownie dramatyczną! I jakże byłaby inaczej mową? Monolog nawet jest rozmową ze sobą albo z duchem rzeczy” [because it is speech, must be necessarily dramatic! And how otherwise

⁸ I. FIK, *Uwagi nad językiem Cypriana Norwida*, Kraków 1930, p. 55; see also W. TORUŃ, *Wokół Norwidowej koncepcji słowa*, Lublin 2003 (chapter *The ontology of the word*).

would it be speech? Even the monologue is a conversation with one's self or with the spirit of things], *Milczenie*, PWSz VI, 232), but also the entire reality. If, according to Norwid, dialogical, dramatic forms are the instrument of learning the reality, "a specific artistic «ontology» and «epistemology»⁹, the conversations of "mute beings" have an ontological and epistemological meaning; they participate in the process of dramatic "manufacturing" of the Truth.

However, the fact that things are given voice does not mean that their world is independent of human beings. Speech, admittedly, gives things a separate ontological identity and a kind of subjectivity but, at the same time, it emphasises their anthropomorphisation, and in fact points to the human context of their existence. Therefore, human traces are visible in both the surroundings of things and in the things themselves. In *Wieczór w pustkach*, emptiness and silence, which presume a lack or absence, first of all indicate the personal absence of the man. In this situation, human manifestation is reflected in the space of the flat and the objects gathered in it: "Tak i mieszkanie człowieka w samotnej godzinie / Ma swój wyraz, gdyż nawet osłupiałe sprzęty / Na głos się zdobywają" [And thus a flat of a man in a lonely hour / Has its expression, since even silent instruments / Gain voice] (PWSz I, 30) – writes Norwid. In the poem *Po balu*, which as we know has become an integral part of *Za kulisami*, footsteps left by footwear on the floor speak from the ground, "jak z książki" [like from a book], while a dropped "kwiatu listek" [flower leaf] whispers something with its paper lip "Wśród salonu pustego sam i sam" [Among the empty living room alone and alone] (PWSz I, 318). At the same time, these things point to those participants of a merry feast who are already absent in the room and discreetly valorise the fragment of the human world such as the living room.

Thus, the man impresses his individual mark on things, he reflects in them his own self – intellect, affects, memory, values, beliefs. As a result, the humanised things experience, survive, and think in the human way. Often, they also represent human behaviours and gestures, sometimes even, they imitate human facial expressions. It can be said that Norwid's things live a rich inner life and communicate it using speech. The fan from the draft poem [Miło być od swojego czasu zrozumianym] musters the courage to have an inner monologue, in which it dreams of transcending loneliness, experiencing understanding and authentic bond through joint thinking, compassion, and conversation. The issue of possessing souls by things, as an element of polemics with Matejko, is humorously thematised in the conversation of the Hat-case with the Umbrella-case [Na "Kazanie Skargi" Jana Matejki].

⁹ S. ŚWIONTEK, *Wstęp*, [in:] C. NORWID, *Pierścień Wielkiej-Damy czyli: Ex-machina-Durejko*, compiled by S. Świontek, Wrocław 1990, p. XV.

By contrast, the dialogue of the Harp, Karabela, Solid Belt, Fan and Whip, in the poem [O, jakżeś drogim jest klejnotem], is an attempt made by seemingly incompatible things to search for a common plane of existence; from the position of the Harp and Whip, it turns out that the effort to serve the man can be a source of mutual understanding and a sense of brotherhood. The Whip says to Fan: “I pewno nie ma dwojga rzeczy, co byłyby / Równiej zbliżone pracą i w też same tryby; / Z czego wniosek, że przecie my się rozumiemy” (PWsz II, 265) [And surely there are no two things that would be / Equally similar in their work and functioning; / From which we can conclude that after all we do understand each other]. In the Harp’s dream we can even hear “zacne: K o c h a j m y s i ę” (PWsz II, 264) [kind-hearted: Let us love one another]. In spite of the fragmentary form of the work, considering Norwid’s opinion on *Pan Tadeusz* and the poet’s attitude towards corporal punishment (the whip in the poem reminds of it) adopted in the gentry’s world, it can be said that Mickiewicz’s phrase has here an ironic overtone.

The relationship between things and people in the examined works by Norwid relies also on the fact that it is the man who determines the status of things, determines their meaning and usefulness. As anthropological studies prove, the semantics of things always constitutes itself in a dynamic tension between the subject and the object¹⁰. A similar process can be observed in Norwid’s works. For example, *Toast* presents things seeking to improve their fate, that is, to redefine their existence in terms of their usefulness for human. An accidental event such as fire makes the bucket of water triumphant in these circumstances. The narrator discovers, however, the significance of this subject that goes beyond its immediate usefulness. Clean water filling the bucket, water that is “służebna, cicha, prosta, szczęśliwie uboga” [servant-like, silent, simple, happily poor] connotes with the sky, with the water of life, with the miracle of water turning into wine. This is a very good example of the polysemous character of things and the multiple perspectives that must be adopted to learn them – context, situation, temporal and spatial embedding turns out to be important for the meaning of objects, but there is also a deep, extra-sensory and extra-human truth of things, reaching the sacral foundations of being. It is worth noting here that inquiring the truth is the subject of one of Omegitt’s statements in *Za kulisami*:

[...] Patrząc na przedmiot – twierdzi bohater dramatu – nie widzimy bynajmniej powierzchni jednej, ale przez tajemnicze a mistrzowskie *poczucie-ogółu* widzimy prawie że współcześnie

¹⁰ See J. BARAŃSKI, *Świat rzeczy...*, pp. 193-194. As the author argues, people and things are bound by an unlimited number of sympathetic relationships. Hence the obvious conclusion: research into the world of things must be coupled with research on human.

wszystkie inne przedmioty bryłowości i przecięcia. Im zaś przedmiot widzenia zupełnie jest rozumny w swej całości, tym zupełnie i prędzej obejmujemy go jednym okiem ze wszech miar.

Podobnie jest, i zwłaszcza, z *Prawdą!*” (DW VI, 90-91)

[[...] Looking at the object – claims the protagonist of the drama – by no means do we see one surface, but through the mysterious and masterful *general-sense* we see, almost in a contemporary way, all the other bulkiness and intersections of the object. The more rational the observed object is in its entirety, the more thoroughly and quicker we capture it with an eye glance from every angle.

Similarly, and especially, the same applies to the *Truth!*]

Thus, in Norwid's poetic world, objects are clearly dependent on the perceiving, cognising subject. In a sense, the man manifests in them along with his experience and subjectivity. However, owing to the fact that things belong to the sphere of the so-called extended self of man, they obtain the status of forms of his expression, become incarnations of the content of his soul, which of course does not undermine their objective existence which is to be measured by the Truth. The saturation of things with the reality is acknowledged in their activity and relationship with humans, or more precisely – in the impact that things can have on the course of life of an individual and a community. Certainly, the perception of things as an “actor” of the social world was not strange to Norwid. He showed this aspect of the being of things on many occasions, especially in works where he introduced objects into the magical-ritual realm of the presented reality, he gave them the status of “actors” that not only speak, but also act, are capable of initiating the transformation of human protagonists and their social environment.

In *Garstka piasku*, the sand from the cemetery grave, subsequently placed in the “sand clock”, becomes the central figure of the work. As the sand passes through the hourglass (whose shape resembles a goblet, which is quite relevant here), its voice can be heard, perceived as a murmur or a silent whisper. The speech of the sand is heard somewhere on the borderline between the inner and external world of the narrator. The quoted speech acquires autonomy indicating the objective existence of the subject of the utterance but, at the same time, it forms an integral part of the spiritual state and the imaginative life of the person listening to and reporting the words uttered by the sand. Norwid's legend, formally a prose poem, has the status of a meditation of “insignificant things”, it is contemplation based on the idea of *vanitas*. The narrator presents himself as a person stricken with all-embracing, existential sadness (“Zaiste, smutny jest ten świat aż do śmierci!” [Indeed, sad is this world until death!]) (DW VII, 97).

Going to the cemetery – reminiscent a bit of Hamlet – he wants to experience his sadness as sadness “człowieka dla człowieka”) [of a man for a man] (DW VII, 93), with no indication of the cause and address. In this crisis situation the speech of the sand plays an initiating role. By telling two parallel biographies of exiles, both citizens and soldiers, the sand reveals to the narrator the testamental meaning of the “past lives” of specific people, and with his help it also communicates “the hidden things” on a higher scale of meaning. The narrator of the legend thus gains access to the mystery of death and the grave, he learns the secret of memory and tradition, and finally confronts the mystery of man as a social being, which should cultivate brotherhood and the fulfilment of the apostolic mission. To be more precise, the narrator meets two historical variants of these truths, because the story of a handful of sand also addresses the mystery of the history for which the caesura is Jesus Christ, dividing the time into the pre-Christian and Christian era.

His appearance in the history is also important for the handful of sand featured in the title – writing in the sand, Jesus leaves in it the mark of His presence, making it His sign, the thing potentially speaking in His name. Fulfilling the function of the medium of meanings hidden in the matter in Norwid’s legend, the Sand reveals the palimpsest structure of the past which conditions the present, including, of course, the narrator’s present, because the Sand’s words put him against two model visions of the death of the exiled man. The man of the pre-Christian era ends his life in solitude by committing the act of suicide, after his death he falls into complete oblivion: the grave hides all traces of his earthly existence without becoming the carrier of social memory. Whereas the exile of the post-Christian era, despite his suffering and longing for the homeland that he experiences with the intensity equal to his Roman counterpart, departs as a Christian knight, an apostle among his fellow people, a “son of PEACE”. He stays “przy onej chorągwi niewidzialnej, która jest sumieniem dziejów” [by this invisible banner which is the conscience of the history], and his grave is “słup graniczny onego to niewidzialnego miasta, którego charakter y ludzi strzegą” (DW VII, 99) [the boundary pole of this invisible city, guarded by people’s characters]. Revealing the sense of Christian death, the Sand thus brings comfort to the narrator in his sadness. At the same time, his statements are an encouragement to continue the apostolic mission (this can be associated with the planned letter to a neighbour). They also give an instruction on the need for historical knowledge: “Wiedz, że to przez *tradycję* wyróżniony jest majestat człowieka od zwierząt polnych, a ten, co od sumienia historii się oderwał, dziczeje na wyspie oddalonej i powoli w zwierzę zamienia się” (DW VII, 98) [Know that it is the *tradition* that distinguishes the dignity of the man over field animals, and the one who broke

away from the conscience of the history runs wild on a remote island and slowly turns into an animal], which turns out to be also a form of self-knowledge and a source of identity for a man.

While reading *Krakus* we enter the realm of analogical meanings and situations. Here too, the object, this time – the stone threshold of the castle ruins, is an element of the initiation structure, crucial for the course of action of this mysterious drama¹¹. As we remember, the title character of the poem, wounded and abandoned by his brother, rival in the fight for the royal throne, seeing the world through the prism of the idea of *vanitas*, arrives in the dark night to the “deep wilderness” where he meets and talks to the threshold to which he immediately develops a special affinity – both are in fact similarly trodden down and humiliated. The Threshold, as it itself tells Krakus, gained the soul and the ability to speak after the destruction of the castle. Since then it has been barring the way for travellers and introducing them to an invisible palace, which, as it is phrased, “gdzie bym nie legł, stawa” (DW V, 183) [wherever I would lie, it stands]. Tired and sad Krakus lays down next to the Threshold and soon he is brought to the palace’s emerald cave. The Threshold reports this as follows:

Książę się kładziesz w ogrodzie zamkowym,
W grocie bezwidnej z drogiego kamienia,
Gdzie źródło w konchy spada alabaster,
Stół z niewinnymi ofiarami czeka:
Mleko, owoce i miodowy plaster
Podaje cisza, przyjaciółka człeka,
Nie kłamająca natrętnymi słowy –
(DW V, 184)

[My prince, you lay down in the castle garden,
In the dark grotto of expensive stone,
Where the source falls into the alabaster conch,
A table with innocent victims awaits:
Milk, fruit and honey slice
Is given by silence, a friend of the man,
Not lying with intrusive words –]

¹¹ I refer here to my own interpretation of *Krakus*, which I presented in the book: “*Misteria polskie*”. *Z problemów misteryjności w dramacie romantycznym i młodopolskim*, Kraków 1996, pp. 49-68; see also: W. SZTURC, *Studia nad symboliką inicjacji w „Krusie” Cypriana Norwida*, [in:] IDEM, *O obrotach sfer romantycznych. Studia o ideach i wyobraźni*, Bydgoszcz 1997, pp. 113-126.

Hence, the threshold of the castle ruin is a symbol of passage, iridescent with various meanings. At the same time, it is a border and a link between the worlds – material and spiritual, external and internal, temporal and eternal. As a threshold initiating the appearance of a mysterious palace, which is a symbol of the soul and the Heavenly Jerusalem¹², it reveals the spiritual dimension of existence, enables contact with the transcendence. The threshold-stone becomes a sign of sacred space, the foundation of the altar, which brings to mind the biblical context, noted by Norwid in [*Notatki z mitologii*]: “Pod ręką Jakuba kamień [...] przyjmuje pomazanie jako figura Mesjasza. Beth-el” [From the hand of Jacob, the stone [...] accepts anointing as a figure of the Messiah. Beth-el] (PWsz VII, 265). In his encounter with the Threshold, Krakus also notices the possibility to have insight into “za-świat” [the be-yond], descending into the depths of the earth, into the space of the grave. Falling asleep, he symbolically experiences death, owing to which he can later identify himself with the world of the dead: “Jestem spod kamienia, / Spod mchów – z narodu, który skryła góra. / – Tam czaszek nagość popiół grzeje szary” (DW V, 210) [I am from under the stone, / Under the moss - from the nation hidden by the mountain. / – There the nakedness of skulls is warmed by gray ash].

For Krakus, the crossing of the threshold does not only signify the cognitive act of meeting with the transcendence (the dark night brings the light of understanding¹³), but it also opens the way leading to self-knowledge, inner maturation, reaching the truth of the Divine Logos deposited in the depths of the human soul.

The proper initiation of the protagonist of the drama takes place in the cave to which he is transferred by the Threshold. Here, the protagonist participates in the symbolically presented act of worship – the Eucharistic liturgy. A table full of food, a spurting source, emeralds evoking the image of the interior of the Grail goblet – these are liturgical signs. The liturgical action itself reflects the Last Supper and through it, it introduces the Paschal Mystery which reveals the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ. It also announces the Messianic Banquet at the end of the history, and thus also prepares for the final, eschatological transformation. The immediate fruit of the process of initiation into the sense of the work of salvation will be the inner transformation of Krakus, for whom the state of humiliation will turn out to be the path of glory, and the initiatory death – the threshold of life. The hero will come out of the emerald cave spiritually prepared to fulfil the act of sacrifice through which, at the expense of his own existence,

¹² J.E. CIRLOT, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, London 1962, pp. 37-38.

¹³ For Norwid's night as a night of understanding see I. SŁAWIŃSKA, “Podróż do kresu nocy”, [in:] EADEM, *Reżyserka ręka Norwida*, Kraków 1971.

he will destroy the evil in the life of his nation. Thus, when the initiation process started by the Threshold reaches its end, the Prince will forcefully utter the following words: "O! wiem – *wiele wiem* – – *mogę!* – *wiele wiem* – – *m o g ę!*" (DW V, 196) [Oh! I know - I *know a lot* – – I *can!* – I know a lot – – I can!].

In *Za kulisami* we deal with an exceptional accumulation of speaking and acting things. In this work, the examined topic of Norwid's creativity seems to have reached its zenith and, at the same time, obtained a new scope of meaning. To the world of the characters of his drama, the author introduces masks, i.e. specific material objects, which include both the specially formed surface obscuring the face and the costume together with various attributes that accompany it. From an anthropological perspective, however, it is impossible to reduce the definition of a mask to its existence as an object or a set of objects. The mask must be understood in a broader sense: "as a more general category of expression, including disguise, and in the extended sense – any transformation of one's appearance"¹⁴. The extended understanding of the mask concerns especially its communicative dimension. The mask, "firstly, as a disguise, is used to camouflage the individuality; secondly, it symbolically gives a new identity"¹⁵. In the anthropological discourse, reaching even deeper – to the archaic tradition, the functional aspect of the mask, namely its magical, initiatory, mysterious role – the role of the original tool unifying transformations under the rites of passage, is also important. Therefore, the mask conceals, evokes fear, integrates the living with the dead, but above all "creates a relationship between the masked man and the being it represents"¹⁶. Thanks to the mask, the man can find his way to the spiritual world, to another social status, to his own deep Self.

Norwid motivates the presence of masks in *Za kulisami* in many ways. The action of the drama takes place in a space that, as the first stage direction informs, "przedstawuje między-sionek teatru i maskaradowej sali" (DW VI, 73) [presents the intersection of the theatre and the masquerade hall]. Already this preliminary remark allows to associate the appearance of masks with the situation of the carnival masked ball, which also includes allusions to morally ambiguous Warsaw masked balls, as well as with the theatrical staging (a theatrical spectacle with the use of masks, e.g. *commedia dell'arte*). The motto preceding the work additionally directs our attention towards the Venetian carnival,

¹⁴ A. BOHOLM, *Weneckie widowiska karnawałowe w maskach*, transl. by J. Jaworska, [in:] *Karnawał. Studia historyczno-antropologiczne*, ed. W. Dudzik, Warszawa 2011, p. 205.

¹⁵ EADEM, p. 206.

¹⁶ K. KERÉNYI, *Człowiek i maska*, transl. by A. Kryczyńska-Pham, „Polska Sztuka Ludowa. Konteksty” 2002, vols. 3-4, p. 141.

in which the masks play, as is well known, the leading role, but also towards “Venetian Shrovetide”, i.e. the poetic image of the masquerade, in which Malczewski has combined both the Italian and Polish carnival customs¹⁷. In connection with such a broadly defined field of reference, the masks in Norwid’s drama become an important centre of metaphorisation of the presented world, where one can see the image of the “puppetry of life” or the “masquerade of life”¹⁸, the implementation of the *theatrum mundi* topos¹⁹, and finally the references to the carnival motif of futility and the very carnival itself as a holiday based in different cultures on the scenario of the rite of passage, which in a symbolic way expresses and emphasises the change in the social status of individuals (especially those having a society-integrating function) and entire groups in crucial moments of their lives²⁰.

The heroes of the drama, appearing in disguise, are differentiated by Norwid due to the type of mask worn by them. The following persons take part in the masquerade: 1. real characters in ball masks (Lia in the mask of Heloiza, Sofist-off in the mask of Abelard, Emma as Domino); 2. characters wearing the “mask” of a meaningful name (Fifraque, Glückschnell); 3. characters that through their “mask” exist in their social function (Critic, Feuilleton, Commune Poet, Conspirators); 4. masks originating in the Venetian carnival and associated with *com-media dell’arte* (Page, Harlequin, Pierrot, Mandolin); 5. fantastic masks (Dianna, Night, Astrologist, Diogenes, Domina, Violets)²¹. The list shows that the mask, in the literal and metaphorical sense, covers the faces of almost all the participants of the ball in *Za kulisami*. Only Omegitt and his servant Malcher do not conceal their identities, but stay themselves throughout the entire duration of the drama. The above classification also reveals a series of variants of the relationship man-mask shown in the drama, which undoubtedly points to Norwid’s increased interest in the problem of using the mask as a means of expressing the

¹⁷ I wrote about this in the book *Poszukiwanie wspólnoty. Estetyka dramatyczności a więź międzyludzka w literaturze polskiego romantyzmu (preliminaria)*, Kraków 2011, pp. 299-314 (chapter *Kulig Polaków. Między obyczajowością zapustną a literackim obrazowaniem życia zbiorowego*).

¹⁸ See T. MAKOWIECKI, I. SŁAWIŃSKA, *Za kulisami „Tyrtęja”*, [in:] K. GÓRSKI, T. MAKOWIECKI, I. SŁAWIŃSKA, *O Norwidzie pięć studiów*, Toruń 1949, p. 37, 53.

¹⁹ See S. ŚWIONTEK, *Norwidowski teatr świata*, Łódź 1983, passim.

²⁰ See R. KASIMOW, *Poetyka karnawału i obrzędów przejścia. Rozmyślenia nad pojęciem „karnawał”*, transl. by B. Chmielewska, [in:] *Karnawał. Studia historyczno-antropologiczne*, pp. 281-290.

²¹ Cf. T. MAKOWIECKI, I. SŁAWIŃSKA, *Za kulisami...*, pp. 55-56.

human Self. By putting on their mask, the characters of the drama usually hide the truth about themselves, trying to expose a false identity (this is how Lia and Sofistoff act). At the same time, in many cases the mask is the material equivalent of the Self reduced to only one dimension of existence; it is a manifestation of the concentrated expression of a human type, and not of people living their full life (the mask of a meaningful name or social role). But sometimes the mask prevails over the person who wears it to such an extent that we can no longer guess whose expression it is and whether there is still someone hiding behind it; maybe the mask is "empty", self-sufficient, without the masked person (theatrical masks, fantastic masks)²². At the same time, the expressive status of masks is closely related to their ontological status. Masks make the characters of the drama unreal, they give them some features of hybridity (people-things), and even entirely objectify some of the ball attendants. This, of course, influences the way the drama presents interpersonal relations and the course of dramatic dialogues. In the area of existential falsehood, the word loses the value of the person's expression, it also loses communicative effectiveness. Hence, in *Za kulisami* the reader will frequently find short, broken, turbulent exchange of opinions, often related to the characters having different views in their conversations, which is undoubtedly favoured by the satirical composition of the work. As a result, the drama paints a picture of deformed dialogue relations and the disorderly social life. The reader will also find here interactions with masks which take place on the border between the objectively existing world and one's subjectivity; it can be assumed that these interactions are intrapersonal and they are part of an internal dialogue of the characters, in particular of Omegitt (his dialogues with Violets), but also of the subject of the work (masks of *comedia dell'arte*, characters-musical instruments)²³.

If we look at Norwid's work through the prism of a ritual scenario of spectacles with masks, it turns out that the mask does not function here as a tool of unifying transformation in the positive sense of the term, because it does not lead to metamorphosis, to spiritual transformation of the man, but to his falsification, and even objectification and, eventually, perhaps even spiritual

²² In this context, it is worth recalling Kerényi's words: "Whoever wears the mask is constantly dead or a monster"; see IDEM, *Człowiek i maska*, p. 146. The relationship of the mask with the grave, with the world of the dead, is a subject widely known to researchers of the rites of passage, as each rite of passage contains elements of the symbolism of death and rebirth.

²³ I omit this issue, as I wrote about the subject of *Za kulisami* and its manifestations in the world of drama in the book: *Dramat i romantyczne Ja. Studium podmiotowości w dramaturgii polskiej doby romantyzmu* (Kraków 2002, pp. 291-314).

death. It is not without reason that Diogenes (this mask remains at the service of the author's irony), while searching for a man at a masquerade ball, utters the following words to one of his interlocutors: "*Sit tibi crinolina levis!*" (DW VI, 90), which directly refer to the popular tombstone inscription, but also to the common ending of funeral speeches: *Sit tibi terra levis!* Meanwhile, as he notices Sofistoff in Abelard's costume, he extinguishes the lantern and stops further search, announcing: "Oto i człowiek !... [...] To on! – on – niechybnie – – Inaczej nie wdziewałby maski ze wschodem słońca..." (DW VI, 102) [Here is *the man!* ... [...] It's *him!* – *him* – surely – – Otherwise he would not have put on the mask at the sunrise...]. Of course, we can easily spot Norwid's irony in this passage.

Upon making the mask a tool of his uncompromising and sometimes even cruel anthropological analysis, in *Za kulisami* Norwid tries to depict the state of human existence as being suspended: between the subjective, spiritual, living, and the objective, material, dead. Employing the methodology of anthropological discourse, one would have to call this state a liminal state. In the rites of passage this state follows the phase of the separation of the individual from the primary state (status) from which it is to be excluded and precedes the inclusion to the new state (status). Thus, the liminal phase refers to belonging to the "abnormal" state, when the characteristics of the subject of the ritual become ambivalent, they escape the clear-cut classification which normally defines their place in the cultural space. Liminality also has a general social dimension – a society in this phase is devoid of internal structure, undifferentiated, falls into chaos²⁴. While the title character in *Krakus* overcomes this state by crossing the threshold (Lat. *limen*), after which he is included into social life through the act of sacrifice, which in turn provides the basis for the establishment of the national community, in *Za kulisami* the rite of passage is not completed. The development of the protagonists of the drama, both in the dimension of individual identity and in the dimension of collective identity, is halted at the stage of liminal ambivalence. Only Omegitt, who does not hide himself behind a mask, is not threatened by objectification. After the night of

²⁴ See A. van GENNEP, *Rites de passage*, Paris 1909; V. TURNER, *Betwixt and between. The liminal period in the rites de passage*, New York 1964. "Liminal entities exist neither here nor there; they exist between positions designated and ordered by law, custom, convention and ceremonial. Their ambiguous and undefined attributes find expression in the rich diversity of symbols in many societies that sanction cultural and social change with a rite. Liminality is often compared to death, stay in the mother's womb, being invisible, darkness, bisexuality, remote place and eclipses of the sun or the moon", wrote Victor Turner. See IDEM, *Liminalność i communitas*, transl. by E. Dzurak, [in:] *Badanie kultury. Elementy teorii antropologicznej*, compilation and introduction by M. Kempny, E. Nowicka, Warszawa 2004, p. 241.

the ball and theatrical premiere, he leaves the masquerade, the field of illusion and vanity, maintaining a deep bond between his own Self and forms of expression (both individual and artistic), between himself and the world perceived in terms of cosmological holism²⁵. From the liminal existential experience, depicted as descending to the limbo (*W pamiętniku*) and plunging into the abyss (DW VI, 86), he comes out as a hissed poet and a man rejected by a woman²⁶, but still as a man *sensu stricto*, except that in Norwid's diagnosis of the civilisation it is probably the last man, the last believer and defender of "świętej tajemnicy rzeczywistości" [the sacred mystery of the reality], whose source is the image of "świata-całego" [the whole world] (DW VI, 51-52).

To sum up these deliberations it is reasonable to ask the question about the conclusions that might be drawn after reading the analysed group of Norwid's texts. In spite of the narrow field of observation, I believe we might risk a few generalisations, since the works analysed here bring a rich, multi-faceted approach to the problem of things, and most importantly, they show what in this area seems specific to Norwid. They emphasise the mediating role of things, which in this poetic world exist as: 1. the material sign of the spiritual basis of the reality, the Divine transcendence, the Truth; 2. the expression of the human self, its content, structure and acts; 3. an attribute, a tool of social interactions, initiation, ritual activities, and thus an element of the dynamics of individual and collective identity. One can hope that both generalisations and detailed analyses shed additional light on the issue of mutual relations between spirit and matter in Norwid's work. They also allow to notice a significant evolution of the poet's views in this regard. Its indicator would be the transition from the imagination of things animated by the power of the spiritual to the imagination threatened by the objectification of the man.

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²⁵ As a man existentially immersed in the world, Omegitt presents himself in the monologue delivered against the background of the starry sky (Act II), which is, among others, the act of affirmation of the Whole and of its source – the Truth. It is worth noting on this occasion that the scheme of the rites of passage always has the "cosmic" final – the phase of inclusion involves "overcoming the chaos and joining the realm of the cosmos". See R. KASIMOW, *Poetyka karnawalu...*, p. 139.

²⁶ The love theme in *Za kulisami* is closely related to the ritual scenario of the drama – anthropology treats the period of engagement as the liminal phase of the rite of passage, and the mask in the course of the rite is sometimes associated with the wedding procession. It should be added that the carnival (incl. Venetian carnival) is usually the time of wedding ceremonies.

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NORWIDOWSKIE DIALOGI RZECZY

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł przedstawia problematykę Norwidowskich rzeczy, opartą na grupie utworów poety, należących do różnych faz jego twórczości (*Wieczór w pustkach (fantazja)*, *Toast. Fantazja*, *Bajka*, [Na „Kazanie Skargi” Jana Matejki], [O, jakże drogim jest klejnotem], [Miło być od swojego czasu zrozumianym], *Garstka piasku. Legenda, Krakus. Tragedia, Za kulisami. Fantazja*), w których rzeczy posiadają status bohaterów mówiących, zdolnych do wchodzenia w relacje dialogowe lub *quasi-dialogowe*. Literaturoznawcza i antropologiczna analiza powyższego materiału pozwoliła na zaobserwowanie mediacyjnej roli rzeczy w świecie poetyckim Norwida. Poeta nadaje im status materialnego znaku duchowej podstawy rzeczywistości, Boskiej transcendencji, Prawdy; czyni je nośnikami ekspresji ludzkiej jaźni, jej treści, struktury i aktów; powierza rzeczom funkcję narzędzi interakcji społecznych, inicjacji, działań rytualnych stanowiących o jednostkowej i zbiorowej tożsamości. Znacząca okazuje się ewolucja poglądów poety na temat świata rzeczy, a mianowicie przejście od wyobrażenia rzeczy ożywionych mocą tego, co duchowe, do wyobrażenia zagrożonego urzeczowieniem człowieka.

Słowa kluczowe: Cyprian Norwid; rzeczy; dialog; maska.

NORWID'S DIALOGUES OF THINGS

S u m m a r y

The article presents the problems of Norwid's things based on a selection of works written in various phases of the poet's life (*Wieczór w pustkach (fantazja)*, *Toast. Fantazja*, *Bajka*, [Na „Kazanie Skargi” Jana Matejki], [O, jakże drogim jest klejnotem], [Miło być od swojego czasu zrozumianym], *Garstka piasku. Legenda, Krakus. Tragedia, Za kulisami. Fantazja*) in which things have the status of talking heroes, capable of entering into dialogues or quasi-dialogues. A literary and anthropological analysis of the above material allowed us to observe the mediating role of things in the poetic world of Norwid. The poet lends them the status of a material sign of the spiritual basis of reality, Divine transcendence, Truth; he makes them means of expression of the human self, their content, structure and acts; he entrusts the things with functions typical of the tools of social interaction, initiation, ritualistic activities of individual and collective identity. The evolution of the poet's views on the world of things is noteworthy, namely the transition from the imagination of things animated by the power of the spiritual to the imagination threatened by the objectification of the human being.

Key words: mask; Norwid's world of things.

Summary translated by Rafał Augustyn